

Berlin Dahlem, Breitenbachplatz 18

March 31, 1959

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Dear Bob:

CONFIDENTIAL

I was so glad to see you after such a long time. You were asking me whether I had any ideas of my own how to deal with the present situation. I am all too eager to answer even at the risk that the letter becomes rather lengthy.

My starting point is that we have lost, quite unnecessarily, crucial time while insisting on a series of conferences with such time-absorbing issues as a general German settlement, peace treaty or even European security. All this is highly important. But whether we like it or not, we have to tackle the first thing first, and this most urgent issue is Berlin.

We have to assume that Khrushchev was fully aware of the consequences of his decision to single out Berlin and to choose the presentation by an ultimatum. That may have to be understood as his intention to put the time pressure on us. It could mean something else, too: that time is running out for his internal commitments to remove from the Satellite orbit that inherent danger of an unsettled Eastern-German statut. I do not follow Walter Lippmann's thesis that the Kremlin fears an East-German uprising. Rather I would suspect that Khrushchev does not like the impending threat of an Ulbricht-revolt. The Russian army might be well equipped to deal with a worn-out population. But Moscow's diplomacy might be at a loss if Ulbricht's Central Committee manages to involve the Kremlin in a sovereign - East Germany technics of little blockade or long-term strangulation.

Maybe, this latter evaluation is too optimistic, and Khrushchev's activity is the result of his real - or imaginary - position of strength. That would not change our painful dilemma. Either we have to call his bluff. Or we have to admit that he really means it: then we better stop bluffing ourselves into a major political debacle. Why do we not nail him down on his insistence

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that the Berlin issue, as a matter of foremost urgency, has to be settled first? Taking him by his word that a Berlin accord might be regarded just as such a historic test-case as the Austrian peace treaty, we should surprise him with a bold and constructive Berlin proposal of our own.

Frankly, I am not as much concerned about 'ultimatum' as about the planned proclamation. Once enforced it would weigh unlike heavier than any hurt prestige. By a mere legal trick Moscow's policy toward Germany will change fundamentally:

1) No longer occupation power, Russian diplomacy will be able to back up dozens of new legal claims by the DDR. For instance, while keeping us busy to define the borderline between full blockade (to be resisted) and energizing chicanes (to be tolerated) they might declare Berlin Sector-checkpoints to state border, or commercial airlines might be directed to Schonefel leaving Tempelhof for allied traffic only. Such iron-clad encirclement must affect Berliners deeply, economically, politically and psychologically.

2) With Berlin's formal elevation to Hauptstadt of the DDR the Kremlin policy will have passed its point of no return. From then on, all negotiations about the German question will be overshadowed by this self-imposed obligation, a fact of highest political and emotional (!) value for DDR and Moscow. The historic capital of Germany - as the Russian note, significantly, calls it - will be welcomed as an unsoluble part of Eastern orbit. It will not matter how long a more or less strangulated West-Berlin might manage to survive. The point is that the Kremlin's German policy will be centered around "capital" Berlin's national appeal to the Germans, aiming at a whole series of chain reactions (and actions) on a national level. Since the inner-German climate changes rapidly, you are well advised not to rely too much on the German's passion for frozen situations. And one thing you should take for absolutely sure: neither the Russians nor the Germans will comply with another well-intended freeze on the Elbe. Any major retreat on Berlin will not be followed by total German resignation but

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by a new dynamism."

All our arguments of the last months about "agents" bypass reality. Maybe, the DDR will be kind enough to spare you the view of Vopos by substituting contractual agents from other (US-recognized) countries. Maybe, they will not bother allied vehicles, altogether. The fateful problem remains the German traffic - and here we are trapped by our own rules. Pankow is already in charge of that control. All our plans have, therefore, to be orientated on one overriding question to be answered of Washington in view of the intended new legal statut for DDR and East-Berlin: Are you going to fight for such additional rights, you have to insist on in order to guarantee free inner-German and inner-Berlin traffic? Alas, the question has to be put more bluntly: are you going to fight it now?

I am fully aware of the embarrassing character of such a bluntness. However, in this confidential letter I feel it my duty to call your attention to the most vulnerable spot of our political strategy. If the Russians play it skilfully they will move steadily enough, to make Berliners familiar with things to come, but slowly enough to prevent an early showdown. This kind of creeping climax would be the worst what could happen. Although we certainly have to continue our encouraging talks about Berliners fighting mood we have to be extremely watchful not to become the victims of our own propaganda. 1959 is not 1949! Conditions have changed radically, granting f.i. every Berliner the privilege to demonstrate his love for freedom somewhere more Western. During the first days of summer vacations Berliners are moving, without technical difficulties, to the 500 000. Any strategy of the West has to begin with the scrutiny: is the average Berliner willing to sit the next climax out or will he prefer to look for a more comfortable living in Western Germany? All would be lost - in any case, more than merely West-Berlin - if the communists would be allowed to take revenge for last November's election by provoking some kind of 'negative plebiscite'.

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To sum it up, we cannot evade the Berlin issue, anyhow. Our present tactics of diplomatic delay offer no elements of improvement, whatsoever. On the other hand, negotiating about Berlin would mean, automatically, clearing the way for an all-German settlement. For Berlin is the only issue where the Kremlin, knowingly, has left the door open for four-power talks about it - if limited - inner-German dispute: there is no single problem to be discussed in connection with the reunification of Berlin or mere cooperation or coexistence of the two administrations which must not become exemplary for a final German solution.

Therefore, the challenge - and the unique chance, indeed - might be as how to prevent by all means faits accomplis by the Kremlin. This can only be done

- 1) if we decide to steal Khrushchev's show of his Berlin-first diplomacy by an imaginative proposal about a reunified, neutralized (but still "protected") OPEN CITY OF BERLIN, and
- 2) if we indicate our willingness to pay in exchange for a satisfactory Berlin agreement all such prices - - which have to be delivered, sooner or later, in the German theatre anyhow.

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I cannot accept the argumentation that any discussion of an independent - if reunited - Berlin would constitute another German partition. For I do not envisage a sovereign state. Placed under UN trusteeship (but guaranteed by the present occupation powers) the OPEN CITY would

- (a) belong to both, BRD and DDR,
- (b) be financed by both states, and
- (c) symbolize the claim as the historic capital of Germany by offering both states such all-German facilities as deem necessary to expedite the process of unification.

Of course, that would mean a give and take for both sides. In my opinion the Eastern side would pay considerably more, especially if you look at the long-term implications of such a center of all-German communications. But granted, our

sacrifices would be higher I still do not see the alternative.

While all world strives at flexibility in order to find a way out of our formidable dilemma, Berliners are told they should stop worrying and persevere in immobilism. This kind of treatment with palliatives cannot go on forever. Since last November we exercise public relations. But do we really expect to shy away Khrushchev and Ulbricht by our noisy arrangements of celebrations of the tenth airlift anniversary - - just a few days before the ultimatum expires?

Thinking about a workable Berlin statut for years I feel sure the draft would be a challenging job for any student of international law. Models are at hand, like Danzig and Trieste (do not forget the District of Columbia) and additional solutions could be worked out along the line of self-control by courts of peace and arbitration. Two main difficulties - how to secure free access for all Germans to Berlin or Berliners to both parts of Germany, and how to ensure some anti-Hongkong clauses - could be certainly surmounted, as well as the currency problem. Interdependence between DDR and BRD would be the aim, not the crux of the matter. Even most passionate Pankow objections against removal, say, to Potsdam might be handled by the Russians; there have been many Eastern hints about arrangements for Hinterland and the eagerness to have a "capitalistic outpost" within reach of the Satellite orbit.

Tremendous as such obstacles may be, the real problem remains the price to be delivered to Moscow in hard political currency. As you are well aware, few months of Mr. K's ultimatum have brought about an alarming devaluation of German assets. Practically the West has had to give away free elections, agents and flexibility, not in exchange for Moscow concessions but only in order to press upon certain old-timers in our own ranks an overdue sense of reality. Therefore, I suspect - and you might accept it as debatable possibility - that we will have to settle along the lines of

(a) some kind of recognition of DDR, (b) some kind of renunciation of German bases for atomic weapons, (c) some kind of disengagement,

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(d) some kind of military control, in short (e) some kind of Exit

NATO - or Warsaw pact and (f) some kind of recognition of Eastern frontiers.

All this might happen with, or even without, confederation or peace treaty. The only question still pending might be as to whether the Kremlin will also succeed in the devaluation of these expensive contributions or whether the West will be fast and resolute enough to urge upon the Russians a fair return of concessions.

At this very late moment, even these "concessions" might not be enough. It might suffice for a short-termed status quo on the Elbe till the Eastern part has digested its Berlin coup. To move the Kremlin-Pankow association out of Berlin, something more attractive has to be added. It might be useful not to be too apprehensive in elaborating following three suggestions which seem to be pre-conditional for eventual Russian consent to an all-German settlement, anyhow.

1) Events of the last years have clearly proven that it is not the Kremlin's intention to make a direct deal with Bonn at Pankow's expense. Never I have shared that curious West-German optimism - even among oppositionals - as if there would be always the door open for a sudden Russian switch as soon as the Germans would offer some trading in the field of rearmament. Now it is evident that Bonn's policy has nothing left to induce the Russians to abandon their stronghold in Eastern Germany. If the Kremlin is willing to pay such a price, at all, it will deliver it to Washington in the course of a global American-Russian agreement. Unless you are ready to discuss such a package deal we better stop talking about a German or even a limited Berlin settlement.

2) We should not deceive ourselves regarding the Kremlin's - justified - concern about German rearmament as the only obstacle to a definite solution. Although the Russians probably meant what they said in their increasingly threatening notes about Bonn's military activity there was something more behind the Kremlin's worry about German 'militarism'. I would call it the nightmare of the loaded vitality of 45 millions today and 70 million Germans tomorrow who have proved with dramatic intensity their capacity of unusual inventiveness and productivity. ~~Exactly, as Western policy tried to channel this inherent German dynamism~~

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into reasonable bounds by Montan Union etc., Russian policy might be aiming at similar remedies. Far from merely having to protect itself against military threat, the Kremlin must also secure arrangements which will prevent all of Eastern Europe from being drawn into wake of this loaded vitality - - multiplied by American support.

More seems to be needed than disengagement or guaranteed neutralization. What is required is that the total German potentiality will not be added either to Western or to Eastern Europe and does not constitute in itself a permanent menace. This cannot be accomplished by unilateral measures which are either taken by the Germans themselves or are imposed on them alone. New organizational forms must be created which will enable all European nations, without discrimination and in mutual cooperation, to make their surpluses available to its own under-developed areas and to the less privileged regions of the world. At this turning point of the cold war the establishment of an all-European FUND FOR DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE might not only dramatize a new European willingness for intra-continental cooperation. Making constructive use of the fact that there will be large regions of neutralized or disengaged countries, the FUND should administer earnings by disarmament as well, as additional surpluses of production capacity in order to impress on the larger European community a sense of responsibility and urgency in rendering competitive assistance wherever needed.

Untimely as this suggestion has been regarded during the years of 1955-1958, it might open new avenues at this critical moment where we have to start some serious thinking about a turn from smaller Europe towards a larger one. Still we have to concentrate on a decisive break-through, out of our mere defense line and advancing toward a really convincing goal. Berlin - the capital of all inner-German cooperation; Berlin - the newly confirmed symbol of German unity; Berlin - the center of all-European encounter; Berlin - the seat of that all-European FUND plus associated institutes; Berlin - a pioneering community in the task - it will be a task! - of coexistence: in short, all our acquiescence to

unavoidable negative concessions transformed into such a positive presentation - that might work.

3) To be sure, there can be no solution, whatsoever, as long as we do not provide for face-saving devices, not for us but for the Kremlin. Any arrangement that would relieve Berlin from its present pressure must be, necessarily, regarded as a major Western success. How shall we take care of the Kremlin's sensibility? I do not dare to overtask your patience but I should like to stress that with good will and imagination many intriguing proposals could be elaborated. In order to save the Kremlin another smashing election defeat I would go even so far as to leave reunited Berlin for a certain interim-period without parties or, like the Washingtonians, without voting rights, making use of the Russian formulas for constituting interim councils. And I could imagine some kind of different plebiscites for Berliners, for Eastern and Western Germans about the "sacrifices" they would have to bring or they would expect the other part to make for the sake of a workable Berlin arrangement. Being at this moment at least as much the victims of the free election issue as our red adversaries, we might be wise to propose procedures which could channel eventual compromises into whole-heartedly adopted plebiscites, thus f.i. leaving the Russians the triumph of having brought about a West-German vote in favour of the Rapacki plan and having even used for the Eastern plebiscite the formula of Art. 14 of the Russian peace treaty.

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May I close with two short remarks. First, I would never have written such a controversial letter if I would be satisfied by the official evaluation that all what would be needed at the nearing climax is "firmness". At least, what at Bonn is called strength or firmness might be nothing else but a certain political Couéism which did not work all too well some 15 years ago. Unfortunately our Bonn statements still cling to that strange assumption that all what has been



left from the Hitler-bill has to be paid by a rueful Kremlin. Much would be achieved if the Adenauer government finally would persuade itself to tell the German people the bitter truth.

And secondly, I trust you will not misinterpret this letter as if I was one of the first victims of Mr. Khrushchev's shock-therapy. I do not advocate a give-away program, hardly envisaged for an all-German settlement, for the relatively small Berlin issue. I merely stress that having waited for such a long time the price to be paid for a workable Berlin agreement cannot be paid in Berlin currency. Mere neutralization of the "frontstadt" will not be enough, and the longer we quarrel about concessions the more expensive becomes the final solution.

Of course, these heretical ideas have not been written for Bonn eyes or other public use. As a matter of fact, I understand quite well, why certain things cannot be said by German officials or even oppositionals. However, somewhat experienced to look for a modest seat between the chairs, I do not feel dispensed from the privilege to describe to you the situation as alarming as I see it. I honestly hope you know more and better so that my meditations can be dismissed easily. The only ambition of this letter is not to be called evasive.

After all, my sense for compromises and subserviency has been rather poorly developed. And to a certain extent I feel legitimated to my statements by the fact that I started already 1956 to pave my way back to Berlin, just because I expected events like the present crisis and did not wish to bother others with gloomy predictions without proving ready to share responsibilities right on the spot.

Sincerely,

/s/ Hans

Hans Bernd Gisevius

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MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]

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I am returning the letter from Gisevius to [REDACTED] which the Boss handed out at a recent Deputies meeting. You may remember that he wondered whether this letter was the same as one written by Gisevius to McCloy. The answer is that it is, with one very minor exception involving no change in substance.

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[REDACTED]  
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ER.

April 11 1959  
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